

**Ishbel Myerscough**

**Video Interview Transcript for the Portrait Explorer in the IT Gallery**

Supported by Deloitte

**How did you start the portrait of Helen Mirren, and how did it develop?**

The first sitting was really drawings and I had to work out what room it was going to be in and it had to be in a room with a television because she was going to watch videos of her next part she was playing. And it was either her bedroom, which was going to be not very good to have paint in, or the library so we worked in the library, which was quite dark and I drew all the first day, just lots and lots of sketches most of which weren't very good, but that was partly for myself to relax and work out quite which way... because before I met her I didn't have an idea in my head of how I wanted to paint her and I wanted her to relax and so... she was all very excited about what she was going to wear and it didn't really make much difference because I knew I was going to do a head and shoulders - I just wasn't sure which way the head was going to go. So I drew all day, then I went away and then came back the next day and decided that because each painting is... I don't really know how I'm going to start and so I just approach it. Quite often I do paintings without drawings, but if it's someone I don't know then I do drawings just so that we're more comfortable. She just sat very comfortably in a sofa really, on the telephone or watching a video, talking to me occasionally. Mainly it builds up from the middle out, so hair and clothes aren't important for a lot of the first few sittings, because mainly the eyes, nose and mouth and that slowly appears and it grows out from there. It varies, depending on what painting. But I think she found it fascinating watching features emerge because she couldn't work out how it was going to happen.

**Why did you choose the head and shoulders format?**

I decided to paint her as just head and shoulders because I didn't have a very long time and I wanted to make the painting as strong as possible - she's very strong. When you meet her she's very lovely, but no nonsense, she doesn't waste words. She just struck me as being very contained, very controlled and I wanted something... I didn't want to do something more elaborate that would lose the strength because I didn't have enough time to do it so I decided I just wanted a very simple, strong head and shoulders.

**What aspect of Helen Mirren did you wish to capture in the portrait?**

I just wanted to make her face incredibly strong. She's got quite... she said herself each side is different, it's not very regular and it was quite difficult actually because it wasn't very regular. So if she moved slightly it completely changed her face when with other people it doesn't do that so much.

**Could you describe your style?**

The style that I use people think is quite realistic and it is realistic but I think I suppose I see it as more naive. Because if you use such sharp lines I think you'll end up with a naiver image, because realism tends to be slightly fuzzier, not quite so sharp around the edges. And by putting in a very strong line and if you get that millimetre out, it's wrong and I like the wrongness in it rather than making it... If it's softer it can look more correct and so I think it ends up looking more naive than precise and realist.

**Did Helen Mirren like the portrait?**

She really liked it, yes she really liked it. Well her attitude is great in that, as far as she is concerned, it was my image and she's in so many films and there are so many photographs of her it's not going to be the image that is historically going to be of her so she didn't really mind how I did it. But she did really like it at the end.